

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4254

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0985

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ET

SUBJECT: CONVOYS AND UTILITIES

REF: ASMARA 0974 (DTG 241045Z NOV 76)

1. THE CONTEST ALONG THE KEREN ROAD IS OVER, AND THE EPMG HAS GAINED A SINGULAR SUCCESS. TO 100-PLUS TRUCK CONVOY REACHED KEREN ON SATURDAY, NOV 27, EXACTLY SIX DAYS AFTER IT ORIGINALLY SET FORTH FROM ASMARA. WHILE THIS IS LESS THAN RECORD TIME FOR COVERING THE 70 KM TO KEREN, EPMG SUCCEEDED IN FORCING THE ROAD AGAINST MODERATE TO STIFF INSURGENT RESISTANCE, AND IN THE FACE OF BOLD REBEL THREATS THAT THE ETHIOPIAN FORCES WOULD BE DESTROYED IN THE EFFORT. ONE INTERESTING ASPECT OF THE ACTION WAS THAT THE EPMG TROOPS EXERCISED UNEXPECTED RESTRAINT IN RETALIATING AGAINST VILLAGES AND CROPS ALONG THE ROAD. AT LEAST THREE VILLAGES WERE BADLY DAMAGED BY BOMBING AND GUNFIRE, BUT EVEN ERITREANS ADMIT THAT NO

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VILLAGES OR CROPS WERE DELIBERATELY BURNED BY THE ETHIOPIAN TROOPS.

2. DURING THE WEEKEND OF NOV 27-28, A BATTALION OF EPMG TROOPS WERE TRANSFERRED FROM THE KEREN ROAD OPERATION TO ASMARA TO ESCORT A CONVOY TO MASSAWA. THIS CONVOY DEPARTED ASMARA ON NOV 29, THE FIRST SUCH CONVOY SINCE THE AMBUSH OF AN ASMARA-BOUND CONVOY ON NOV 18. PREMIUM MOGAS SALES RESUMED ON NOV 30, WHILE SALE OF REGULAR REMAINS SUSPENDED, ALTHOUGH IT IS RELIABLY REPORTED THAT THERE ARE MORE THAN ADEQUATE SUPPLIES IN TOWN. THESE SUPPLIES, HOWEVER, ARE BEING HOARDED TO SUPPORT MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE REGION. THERE IS A KNOWN SHORTAGE OF AVGAS, DIESEL AND BULK FUEL, AND THESE PRODUCTS ARE EXPECTED TO RECEIVE PRIORITY SHIPMENT ON THE FIRST CONVOYS FROM MASSAWA. IT IS REPORTED THAT THE EAL FLIGHT FROM ATHENS OVERFLEW ASMARA THE MORNING OF NOV 29 BECAUSE OF A SHORTAGE OF AVGAS.

3. THE UTILITY SITUATION HAS NOT YET RETURNED TO NORMAL IN ASMARA, ALTHOUGH WATER AND RESIDENTIAL LIGHTING HAS BEEN FULLY RESTORED. ON NOV 19, EELPA ANNOUNCED ON RADIO ASMARA THAT INDUSTRIAL PLANTS WOULD NOT RECEIVE POWER FOR TWO WEEKS DUE TO THE OVERHAUL OF ONE OF THEIR GENERATORS AND THEREFORE WORKERS WOULD BE GIVEN LEAVE. FURTHER PROBING REVEALED THAT RATHER THAN A MATTER OF OVERHAULING A GENERATOR, THE EELPA PLANT AT BELEZA HAD BEEN HIT BY INSURGENT SABOTEURS EARLIER THAT WEEK. THE ATTACK WAS DIRECTED AGAINST THE PLANT'S TANK FARM AND PUMPING SYSTEM RESULTING IN A CRITICAL LOSS OF BULK FUEL. REPAIRS ARE UNDERWAY AND ARE NOW EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED DEC 13. AT THE MOMENT, ASMARA IS ONLY RECEIVING 60 PERCENT OF ITS ELECTRIC POWER REQUIREMENT. THE SOLE SOURCE OF WATER FOR THE CITY REMAINS THE MAI NEFHI RESERVOIR WHICH IS FUNCTIONING NORMALLY.

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